Neighborhood Meetings

The following steps are to help you and your neighbors get organized

Your neighborhood meeting is an important time. Certain things should occur.

- The meeting should be orderly and democratic
- People should feel that working together is not only a good idea, but it's fun
- People should have a chance to say what is on their minds
- The meeting should try to include all—it shouldn't be dominated by any individual
- Focus on getting started with those who attend—don't dwell on who didn't come; you don't want people to be discouraged

The first meeting should be planned so people can:

- Meet each other
- Find out what a block organization is and does
- Voice their opinions about what matters most to them and whether having a block organization is a good idea
- Find out how neighbors view their blocks
- Be given specific assignments as well as information about the next steps in becoming organized

Association Officers

From the start, it is important that the association have a chairperson and a recording secretary. At first these positions are only temporary. When block captains and other officers are selected, these tasks are carried out by people chosen by the group. Some blocks elect leaders at the first meeting. Others decide to wait a short time until they get to know each other better.

Role of the chair:
- Usually the person who spends the time and effort getting the meeting together
- Runs the meeting according to the agenda
- Maintains a respectful and orderly process

Role of the secretary:
- Takes written or recorded minutes of the meeting
- Passes around a roll to record names, addresses and phone numbers of those in attendance

Role of the block captain:
- Are responsible for the organization of the members of the block and serve as a representative of their block
- They are a communication link between the chair and those on their block

During the Meeting

1. **Welcome and Introductions**
    Name tags may be helpful. This part of the meeting should be fun and encourage a spirit of togetherness. Ask people to say their name, where they live and what they like best about living in the area.

2. **Set meeting guidelines**
    Have the group decide on the rules for the meeting. Sample guidelines might include:

    Only one person should speak at a time

    Stick to the agenda

    Begin on time and end on time

    The group decides, operating by a process where everyone can support the group's decisions

    Focus on the future, not the past

3. **Discuss what you would like your block organization to look like**
    You may find that this discussion needs to come after you've decided on the concerns or issues you wish to organize around. The more complex or involved the issues, the more likely a fairly structured organization will be necessary.

    Have the group list several different possibilities from nothing to very structured

    Identify the characteristics your organization will need to have to address your concerns or ideas

    Decide what kind of structure will fit your needs

    At this point, it may be time to discuss how you will identify or select people to fill the positions you decide to create. Remember: ***The role of the block leader is to be a facilitator, not a dictator.***

    You will want to elect someone who can bring people together in a constructive, positive way that includes everyone on the block. *This is not a political campaign—it is a campaign to bring people together.* Feel free to postpone this until a later meeting as long as someone is willing to be responsible for running the next meeting.

    Before a block leader is selected, it may be helpful to decide on the length of time the commitment will be for. You may even decide to rotate the responsibility of conducting neighborhood meetings just as long as it's clear who will follow through.

4. **Identify main issues of concern**
    Give everyone an opportunity to voice their concerns. You will find that what matters most to one person may not be as important to another.

    An easy way to develop consensus about what people's concerns are is to use the following steps. By separating the generation of ideas from the evaluation of ideas, people are less likely to need to defend their own ideas and are able to judge all suggestions against an agreed upon standard.

    List as many ideas, concerns or problems as possible. Do not evaluate them now. Not all

issues are negative. They can be framed in positive ways, thus building trust and communication between neighbors.

Example:

Emergency preparedness   Loose pets

Junk cars in yards   Graffiti

Neighbors don't know their neighbors

Identify the characteristics of a block issue.

Example:

It involves many people on the block   It can be clearly defined or described

Most people on the block feel strongly   It deals with something that can be
about it   accomplished

Evaluate the list of ideas, concerns or problems using the characteristics agreed upon for a block issue

Example:

Gang activity/graffiti   We don't know each other well enough

Drug house   Children don't have enough supervision

What may be a concern for one block may not be for another. If your list is short, you may not need to prioritize which issues you will need first. If you have several concerns you may want to start with the issues that are the most important to the most people present and will therefore be acted on before other problems are tackled. Every problem a neighbor has cannot be considered a block issue. Some problems are too personal. A block organization that gets sidetracked into working on an individual's personal problem risks losing the support of many of its members.

Once the most important concerns are decided upon, your block group has an "agenda of action" or a list of things to solve or to change. It is best to begin with only one or two projects and not try to do too much at once. Slow but steady is an important guideline of block organizing. That means to follow through on whatever tasks you undertake and don't do too much.

It is important to keep this part o the meeting moving along. You don't want all your time spent on identifying problems, you want to leave enough time to develop solutions and make assignments so that people leave having accomplished something and having a job to do.

5. **Identifying solutions to the neighborhood concerns**

Select the most important concern to   Now evaluate the solutions that match the
begin   criteria and decide which of the
List as many solutions to the problem as   solutions the group will undertake
possible, but don't evaluate them now   Ask who would be willing to work on
Identify the characteristics of a good   proposed solutions
solution   Set time frame for reporting back

If your group is larger than seven, break into groups of four to seven and identify solutions and characteristics of a good solution. Then have representatives from each group share what they came up with. Combine the lists and eliminate duplications.

If time runs short, you may need to ask for work on possible solutions to be done in committees that would report back at the next meeting. Each committee could be assigned a different concern to work on.

6. **Summarize the meeting's work in conclusion**

Review any decisions about the structure of the neighborhood organization
Review neighborhood concerns agreed upon by the group

Review solutions agreed upon and assignments accepted
Clarify who will distribute minutes of the meeting to the neighborhood
Set the time for the next meeting or activity

If you and your neighbors have decided to work together as an organized group, have discussed matters of shared concern, begun working on solutions to those concerns, made specific assignments for people to follow up and have set a date for the next meeting or activity, you can consider this first meeting a huge success.